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## The U.S.–Pakistan Strategic Relationship

### *Strategic Insights*, Volume VI, Issue 4 (June 2007)

by [Lt Gen Raza Muhammad](#)

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#### Introduction

This dialogue for long-term security and cooperation in the U.S.–Pakistan Strategic Partnership is an excellent concept—the more such dialogues we have the greater the depth and breadth this relationship will have. This is something that we have to work on continuously. The National Defense University and the Naval Postgraduate School must be commended on their initiative.

In their long relationship the United States and Pakistan have had three serious engagements and in between there have been two longish estrangements. The reasons for the engagements are clear—the Cold War struggle against communism, the Nixon-era opening to China, the joint jihadi resistance against the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan and post-9/11, and the war against terror. More significant are the reasons for the estrangements—differing perceptions on India and China, nuclear proliferation, perceptions of the freedom struggle in Kashmir, democracy, and terrorism. In the sixth year of our strategic partnership these still linger as concerns. Nothing has changed them—neither pressures, nor sanctions, not even joint jihad and the present joint war against terror. Perhaps we never looked beyond immediate tactical considerations to the longer term strategic objectives. I think it is time that we did so.

As we focus on long-term considerations it is important that we keep in mind the various studies and scenarios that have been developed over the years because these identify the drivers and the trends that will shape the future. Scenarios, no matter how imaginative, are important because they signal perceptions and priorities and are useful tools for policy formulation and review. The drivers and trends that lead up to them are even more significant. I will just flag some of these and then try and list the recurring trends and futures.

A 1997 document by the U.S. NIC identified drivers and trends in the 2010 time frame. A U.S. DOD study in 1999 on Asian Futures 2025 presented a South Asian scenario in which Pakistan implodes from within, prompting an Indian conventional attack on its nuclear facilities. Pakistan responds with a nuclear strike and the United States and India then jointly take out Pakistan's nuclear capability. A Confederation of India then emerges that includes parts of Pakistan and a collapsed Afghanistan. In 2000, the U.S. NIC updated and improved the 2010 study with a 2015 document and in 2004, the U.S. NIC presented the 2020 study *Mapping Global Futures*. This comprehensively identified drivers and trends and laid out four scenarios.

The Davos World Economic Forum dwelt on the evolving economic scene with robust economic growth creating a new world order—and we saw a bit of that playing out in the last Davos meeting. The next one, Pax Americana, is self-explanatory as the United States manages the international order. The third one was the Islamic Caliphate scenario where a central authority transcending national boundaries controls and guides states and groups challenging the international system as we know it—a step forward from the concept of disparate extremist groups acting on the basis of a common ideology and central guidance. The last one was based on WMD proliferation that creates and maintains a Cycle of Fear leading to active and intrusive actions—both covert and overt. An *Economist* study in 2006 predicted the emergence of four zones—the United States with India in its embrace, an expanded EU, Russia and China, and a Faith Zone that is really a linked Islamic World. In 2005 researchers at the American Enterprise Institute came up with "Pakistan's Loose Nukes Conundrum"—an extremist take-over of nuclear assets and possible U.S. responses with Pakistani Military support.

I have been brief and superficial because I really want to go on to discuss the drivers and trends that are a part of all these studies though the emphasis on each one differs depending on the time-frame of the study. I will also mention briefly the policy implications for Pakistan.

The primacy of the United States—all studies predict that the United States will remain the dominant political, military, technological, and economic power in the world with the capacity to change external environments to suit its interests. The United States will be called on to manage conflict worldwide. We are, perhaps, seeing the limits of this power in Iraq and Afghanistan and the need for alliances and international support. The United States will also face anti-Americanism because of its policies. Pakistan as a strategic partner of the United States benefits from this relationship in many ways—there are no two views on this being an asset for Pakistan with no alternative in the foreseeable future. Pakistan has to build on this and in time ensure national consensus and support for this relationship.

China and India are seen as future global powers and competitors for resources and influence. Their economic growth, human resources, political stability, and military power are the basis for this recognized potential. Pakistan and China have a strategic relationship that has endured and China has helped Pakistan with long-term infrastructure projects. With India, Pakistan seeks a conflict- and hostility-free relationship based on trade and the vision of South Asia as a foundation for future linkages with Afghanistan, Central Asia, and beyond. The United States' policy for South Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia, also influences trends in the region.

Demographics are an important consideration in all future scenarios. Population growth and the structure of the future population in terms of age groups and gender are major aspects as are infrastructure growth, skill levels, literacy, health, resource availability, and socio-economic conditions. This is an area where Pakistan is challenged and needs long-term support to cope with the future problems. This has linkage to the future governance environment and conflict within a diverse society if tolerance does not develop. Weak governments with little credibility will not be able to handle the situation.

Governance gets much importance as it should. This has to be seen within the context of institutional development, rule of law, human and material security, food inflation, law and order, and the ability to utilize resources efficiently. Rapid growth in the global economy, political stability, challenges to democracy, technology, and the growth of radical Islam could be the pressures on governance. There are other aspects that I will not go into, but here again Pakistan has policies that need to be supported. The countervailing effect of economic growth and political stability to extremism is important—but consistent economic growth needs good governance.

Globalization is a phenomenon that is examined from the positive and negative trends. It is a trend that will grow and the economy, political stability, and the internal strength of a country will be important considerations for its status in the connected world. Globalization will also bring new

challenges especially because of high technology. This is an area that Pakistan's current policies are addressing.

Resources, especially energy, water, and human resources, figure prominently. Countries will have to secure sources and develop these to be able to continue to progress. This is another area where Pakistan needs support.

Science and technology—in fact, for Pakistan the entire spectrum of education is extremely important for the environment of the future.

No major global conflict is predicted but there is emphasis on internal conflicts arising from vulnerabilities and perceived injustice. Pakistan faces the danger of continued instability along its western border as long as southern Afghanistan remains volatile—this could mean a resistance movement or a nationalist movement if not controlled by multi-response strategies. Stability in Baluchistan is important for the entire hinterland's development on which the economy of the new port at Gwadar depends. Economic growth, social sector reform, and governance need a stable political and secure internal environment.

The dangers of proliferation persist. This is a worldwide phenomenon. Pakistan, more than any other country, is aware of the exact dimensions of this problem. Pakistan also knows that it has to set a new track in this area. Pakistan has therefore put in place legislative and security measures that are extremely good. The previous constraints that forced lax control are no longer there. This is an area where policies have to conform to international norms but also an area where no compromises can be made on capability.

Finally I must mention some trends that have implications for Pakistan's foreign policy. The United States will continue to rely on its relationships across the Atlantic with the UK, the EU, and on South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Israel, and now India. The Israel–Palestine issue, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the recent war in Lebanon and Hezbollah, the al Fatah– Hamas power struggle and the Iranian situation are events that are creating sectarian divides and new political linkages among Islamic countries as threat scenarios change. Pakistan has to consider the geopolitical and geo strategic reality of its location, its bilateral relations with all its neighbors and its evolving internal situation where Islamist parties are in mainstream politics and there are different views on U.S. policies.

To conclude I would say that Pakistan has been called "a crucial ally in the war on terror and the broader war for the future of the Islamic world." The *U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review Report* stated that "the prospect that a nuclear capable state may lose control of some of its weapons to terrorists is one of the greatest dangers the United States and its allies face," and internal instability was identified as the "core problem." Various reports have emphasized the importance of a long-term commitment to Pakistan. It is, of course, extremely important to get the joint U.S.–Pakistan–Afghanistan strategy right for the struggle in Afghanistan. This has to acknowledge that no one state is the problem but all have problems that require a multi-strategy approach. Beyond this shorter term war on terror there is a need to identify the areas where long-term security cooperation is possible. The drivers and trends and their implications for policies can help us to identify those areas in a future time frame. These would address the issues of economy, internal stability, governance, technology, social sector reforms, demographics, and the unresolved issues that have led to protracted conflict in the past.

## About the Author

Lt. Gen. Raza has been the Commandant of the National Defense University for the past two years. He has been in numerous command, staff, and instructional assignments throughout his

career. His previous assignment was as Director of General Plans in the Joint Staff Headquarters. Gen. Raza is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College.

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